

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

SE News
HD **Canada can lead on climate change, if its leaders match their words with deeds**
BY By MARY ROBINSON
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Chair of The Elders. She has served as the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, the UN special envoy for climate change and was the first woman to serve as president of Ireland.

We stand at a pivotal moment in history. As the world struggles to control the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigate what may be the worst recession in nearly a century, actions taken by countries to ease a climate emergency are at risk of being delayed, diluted or abandoned.

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The climate crisis has lost none of its urgency and the world remains dangerously off course in limiting global warming to no more than 1.5 C above preindustrial levels. Unless we drastically raise our ambitions in cutting carbon emissions, we can expect to see immense suffering, with vulnerable communities across the world bearing the brunt of increased water scarcity, plunges in crop yields and lifethreatening heat waves.

We need global leadership to address the climate crisis and build an economy beyond fossil fuels. Canada has an opportunity to step up and lead from the front.

As Justin Trudeau's government considers its financial response to COVID-19, I urge the Prime Minister to consider how the European Union has put its Green Deal at the heart of its recently agreed-upon 750-billion (\$1.18-trillion) stimulus package, and to take seriously the voices from within Canadian businesses and civil society calling for an ambitious green recovery.

Canada enjoys a historic reputation for environmental leadership. But unfortunately, this credibility risks being undermined by a reluctance to meet words with ambitious decisionmaking.

Recent figures indicate that Canada commits more public financing to support fossil fuels than any Group of 20 country other than China. According to a report released in May by Oil Change International and Friends of the Earth U.S., Canada provides an average US\$10.6-billion in support every year to oil and gas firms via Export Development Canada.

Despite Mr. Trudeau's public recognition of the climate emergency and determined rhetoric around the need for a green economy, this is a trend that has continued during the pandemic.

Since the emergence of COVID-19, Energy Policy Tracker estimates that Canada and its provinces have committed US\$12-billion in support of fossil fuels, as opposed to just US\$1.5-billion for clean-energy initiatives.

The Canadian government appears to have no plan to end or limit its support for fossil fuel companies. It has pledged only to phase out financial aid that meets its narrow definition of an "inefficient" fossil fuel subsidy.

In the decade since Canada and its Group of Seven partners made that commitment, much has changed. We now know that limiting warming to 1.5 C requires not only leaving most fossil fuel reserves in the ground, but also retiring the world's existing coal, oil and gas infrastructure on an accelerated timeline.

And yet, Canada's leaders continue to move in the opposite direction.

Such activity rightly raises concerns about the Canadian government's equivocation over the Vista mine expansion. The expansion would result in Vista becoming one of North America's largest coal mines, with much of the coal destined for Asia, and yet the federal government seems intent on sanctioning the extension without first completing a federal impact assessment.

How can one balance the plans to allow the Vista mine expansion with Canada's stated ambitions to help the world transition away from coal power?

Canada has played a leading role in the Powering Past Coal Alliance – an ambitious and worthy initiative to phase out the use of and investment in coal power at home and abroad. By allowing the Vista mine to ramp up production for more coal-fired power overseas, Mr. Trudeau risks severely damaging his country's credentials on climate change.

When I served as the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, I often looked to Canada to help advance the cause of global justice through its capacity for moral suasion.

This capacity was exemplified at the Paris Agreement negotiations, where Canada was instrumental in securing ambitious targets.

Canada must continue to be a credible force for ambitious climate action. I hope Canadians will join me in calling on their government to align its policies with its climate responsibilities and demonstrate the exemplary global leadership it has shown in the past.

We cannot afford to wait until we are through the looming economic crisis to ramp up our climate response. Canada has an opportunity to lead from the front and show that climate considerations can and should be put right at the heart of government decision-making in these unprecedented times.

CO utdnat : United Nations

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